

CODEL LYNCH

February 26 – March 3, 2009



FINAL REPORT

CODEL LYNCH

Iraq, Afghanistan, Hungary
February 26 – March 3, 2009

Delegation Participants

Rep. Stephen F. Lynch, *Democrat* (MA-09)

Rep. Todd Platts, *Republican* (PA-19)

Rep. Jim McDermott, *Democrat* (WA-07)

Rep. Steven Driehaus, *Democrat* (OH-01)

Rep. Glenn W. 'GT' Thompson, *Republican* (PA-05)

Rep. Gerald E. Connolly, *Democrat* (VA-11)

Accompanied by:

John Arlington, House Oversight and Government Reform Committee

John Cuaderes, House Oversight and Government Reform Committee

Andrew Su, House Oversight and Government Reform Committee

MAJ Michael Avey, Army House Liaison Division

MAJ Ca-Asia Shields, Army House Liaison Division

Mission Statement

From February 26 to March 3, 2009, the Honorable Stephen Lynch, a member of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, led a bipartisan Congressional Delegation (CODEL) on official business to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Hungary.

The primary purposes of the CODEL were to further examine the political and military situations in Iraq and Afghanistan, including reconstruction efforts and to express personal gratitude to American service men and women deployed in those nations. Notably, the delegation was accompanied by Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Stuart Bowen, Jr., for the Iraq portion of the CODEL; Inspector General Bowen briefed the Members on the progress of specific reconstruction projects in the region. Furthermore, the CODEL sought to assess and support the progress of global anti-terrorist financing and anti-money laundering efforts through

coordinated meetings with government and justice sector officials in Hungary.

This report attempts to present and emphasize the consensus findings of Mr. Lynch, Mr. Platts, Mr. McDermott, Mr. Driehaus, Mr. Thompson, and Mr. Connolly.

First and foremost, the delegation expresses its utmost and heartfelt appreciation to the men and women serving in our armed forces, and those who support Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in particular, for their incredible dedication and patriotism.

The delegation was able to meet service members from home states who were currently located in Baghdad, Kabul, and Kandahar, and each Member of Congress had an opportunity to videotape a personal message of gratitude to be played on the Armed Forces Network. The delegation greatly appreciates their enormous sacrifices, and those of their families, on behalf of our nation.

Security and Political Climate in Iraq

The delegation's mobility in Iraq was severely limited, due to a substantial sandstorm that persisted for several days. However, the delegation nevertheless had the opportunity to examine the current political, security, and reconstruction environment in the country through a variety of coordinated meetings with military and Department of State officials.

With some 142,000 U.S. service members currently serving in Iraq, including the "surge" of 30,000 additional U.S. troops in Iraq that began in early 2007, the delegation is able to report that violence is at some of its lowest levels since 2003, particularly in Baghdad. The delegation heard repeatedly from U.S. military and political leaders that while the security and political climate remains fragile, 2009 will be a pivotal year of transition as the government of Iraq takes over security responsibilities, solidifies control over the country, and for both the U.S. and Iraqi governments to build their partnership and implement their security agreement.

While Iraq's future remains integrally tied to the maturation of the Government of Iraq as well as the maturation of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to increasingly and effectively administer Iraq, the delegation was optimistic that major drawdowns in U.S. troop levels were imminent.

In fact, while the delegation was in Baghdad, President Obama made a major announcement at Camp Lejeune, NC of his plan for the cessation of major combat operations withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq over the proceeding 18 months, though the majority of U.S. troops would stay through the end of 2009 to safeguard Iraq's national elections in December. President Obama also announced his intention to keep a residual force in Iraq through 2011, the deadline for the full withdrawal of U.S. forces as negotiated by President George W. Bush and Iraqi leaders, to assist in the further training of the ISF and advising in the conduct of counterinsurgency operations.

The President's announcement of the end of U.S. combat missions in Iraq by August 31, 2010 was resoundingly approved by military officials who briefed the delegation that this timeline was fully achievable and reasonable provided that the security situation remained favorable.

LTG Lloyd Austin Commander, Multinational Corps-Iraq, briefed the delegation that there has been significant progress in stemming violence in Iraq, though the situation remained fragile. The total number of daily attacks in Baghdad is down to only three or four per day. In addition, military forces were no longer encountering explosively formed penetrators from the Iranian border, and saw a decrease in the flow of foreign fighters coming into Iraq. While some low-levels of insurgency were to be expected even after U.S. and coalition forces depart Iraq, and Al-Qaeda networks have remained able to self-sustain themselves, the focus clearly is now on achieving sustainable security by defeating violent extremists and denying any resurgence in extremist activity. This is to be achieved by securing Iraq's borders, cutting financial support to extremists, enabling free and fair elections, providing essential services to the Iraqi people, and by training and empowering Iraqi security forces.

According to General Raymond Odierno, Commander, Multi-National Forces – Iraq (MNF-I), the primary reasons for the drop in ISF and U.S. military deaths in Iraq are due to: the improved ability of the Iraqi Army; the tactics, techniques, and procedures employed by the MNF-I; the surge in

U.S. troop levels; the willingness of ordinary Iraqis and local leaders to cooperate with the Iraqi national government; and the rejection of outside and militia influence, including the waning influence of Al Qaeda in Iraq.

However, General Odierno expressed his concerns about Kurdish-Arab tensions, perceived Sunni marginalization, and destabilizing political rivalries. The latter was underscored by the recent provincial elections where all incumbent candidates lost, yet no one party won a majority of seats.

Furthermore, the failure of the Iraqi government to deliver essential services, the falling price of oil prices on Iraq national revenues, and possible internal discord with Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki could further destabilize the situation in Iraq.

As such, military leaders cautioned the delegation that conditions for sustainable security and handover of security to Iraqi security forces would largely be dependent on and targeted towards the success of the December 2009 national elections. The 19 additional months of U.S. troop presences would allow the flexibility for the military to meet President Obama's timeline for the end of combat operations and transition to the government of Iraq for stability operations and civil capacity building.

Finally, General Odierno stated two goals for 2009 which require support by Congress and the Administration: 1) to expedite the processing of visas for Iraqis who have undertaken special responsibilities on behalf of the U.S. government, as well as for Iraqi students and scientists to visit the United States; Congressman Lynch has agreed to pursue legislation in furtherance of these goals; and 2) to reduce the total number of contractors operating in Iraq from 150,000 to less than 100,000 over the course of the year.

Security and Political Climate in Afghanistan

The delegation was briefed on several aspects concerning the security climate and political situation in Afghanistan, including the upcoming national election process, current military environment, status of counter-narcotic efforts, and oversight of reconstruction efforts.

A. Security Assessment

The delegation arrived in Afghanistan a week following President Obama's announcement that the U.S. would send an additional 17,000 troops to Afghanistan in the coming months. The increase, part of an additional 30,000 troops requested by U.S. commanders and International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), was roundly welcomed by military leaders whom the delegation met with, and were viewed as vital to stabilizing violence and security efforts through national elections scheduled for August 2009.

According to military commanders, an international military presence would still be necessary for at least three to five years. This presence would allow the military to define and meet its counterterrorism goals: to keep Afghanistan from being a platform or safe haven for terrorist activities, to marginalize the Taliban and to not allow insurgents to take over Afghanistan after U.S. and coalition forces leave, and to allow time for the government of Afghanistan to become viable, and to provide a transfer of lead security responsibilities to Afghan security forces. The latter includes growing the Afghan army from 80,000 to over 130,000 personnel, and greatly strengthening the Afghan National Police.

The troop increase was requested by military leaders to supplement actions, especially in the Taliban strongholds in southern and southeastern Afghanistan, against insurgent activities, which remain active due to a disparate coalition presence. As briefed by U.S. drug enforcement agency officials, the delegation notes that high opium production will likely be seen again in the southern regions again in 2009, particularly in Helmand Province. The growth of poppy used for heroin not only keeps the local economy and population marginalized due to dependency on revenue for that crop, but provides continued financing to local Taliban officials and for the trafficking of arms across the border with Pakistan.

The additional troops would allow coalition forces such as the British and Canadians currently in those areas, to maximize their impact on the regions, particularly on border areas, to achieve regional security in concordance with the clear, hold, and build model of counterinsurgency strategy.

While a short-term spike in violence is anticipated as a direct result of the additional military operations, military leaders told the delegation that the troop increase was a game-changer, and greatly needed. Currently, insurgent tactics seem to have changed to small, but high-profile attacks, such as suicide bombings, which feed perceptions of instability by the government of Afghanistan and weakness in coalition force control.

Military leaders, however, told the delegation that they remained concerned about western Afghanistan, where financial and other support continued across Afghanistan's border with Iran. While the two nations share a common border, it was also noted to the delegation that both had other mutual interests in stopping the use of heroin by the population, economic interests in the region, and Shia religious and cultural ties.

Finally, military commanders told the delegation that while military goals remained, greater attention was focused on political situations, including providing a stable climate for national elections, to allow capacity building, to establish a rule of law system, and utilize employment and education as alternatives to the people of Afghanistan in order to break insurgent strongholds on the population.

B. Political Assessment

In meetings with U.S. embassy officials, the importance and urgency of the upcoming Afghan national elections in 2009 was emphasized to the delegation. Confusion over the actual election date, which is currently scheduled for August 2009, remained, as the term of the office of the prime minister, as mandated under the constitution of Afghanistan, is set to expire in May 2009. The potential vacuum of leadership, in contrast to the need for adequate preparations to hold fair national elections, has resulted in a potential constitutional crisis.

Opium production was also a topic of concern to U.S. political leaders, as it continues to bankroll Taliban and insurgent activities. It was underscored to the delegation that not only is the high price for opium an easy incentive to

local growers, but Taliban officials provide loans to finance the production, transport of the product, and even a marketplace for the goods. Opium itself is also relatively easy to store and transport, as opposed to alternative cash crops such as wheat, pomegranates, and raisins, which not only take several years to bear fruit, but also may require additional cold storage and transport means.

The delegation also noted to the embassy of the need to establish interagency liaison officers in Afghanistan, similar to the current Sec. 3161 employees serving in Iraq. One position could be dedicated solely for assistance to Congressional officials, instead of assigning the duties to a foreign service officer, already overburdened with other responsibilities at the embassy station. Such an employee would also be able to facilitate travel and logistics for visiting Members and staff. According to U.S. embassy officials, an initial cost estimate to authorize such a staff, including salary, benefits, and housing would be close to \$484,000 per year.

It is recommended by the delegation that the feasibility of creating such a position be explored further by the Department of State and Department of Defense.

C. Reconstruction

The delegation's meeting with the Kabul-based audit and inspection team of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) provided ample issues for monitoring in the future.

The delegation was disappointed at the relative lack of progress as presented by the SIGAR auditors, which is currently staffed by only a handful of employees. In contrast to the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, which has produced numerous quarterly reports, inspection reports, audit reports, and criminal referrals during its five years of existence, the SIGAR office is just ramping up now, and engineers with technical expertise are only first arriving over the course of the next few months.

While acknowledging different challenges between Iraq and Afghanistan, the delegation expressed its concerns that many of the lessons learned from Iraq would not be heeded in Afghanistan. For example, a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report noted that many weapons

provided to the Afghan army and police could not be accounted for. The delegation was also told that the Afghan auditor general, equivalent to the comptroller general position in the United States, has never even met with GAO during its existence, and was a very weak institution.


Concurrently, the delegation noted that funding for the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) is due to increase at the request of Congress from \$690 million in FY 09 to \$900 million in FY 10, which nearly all of it flowing to CERP programs in eastern Afghanistan. While SIGAR staff assured the delegation that there were adequate security and controls over the release of CERP funds to both military personnel and to Afghan contractors, the delegation believes rigorous oversight over U.S. CERP funding, and of monies appropriated for Afghan reconstruction projects must be continued in the future.

Conclusion


The delegation was honored to represent the United States, our fellow members of the U.S. Congress, and the American people in the course of our visit abroad. In particular, we are thrilled to have the opportunity to greet and gain insights on morale and the situation on the ground from service members serving in Iraq and Afghanistan

It is important to constantly remind Administration officials, however, of the unique role of the House Oversight and Government Reform committee as the lead watchdog committee of Congress to ensure transparent and responsible spending, and to expose waste, fraud, and abuse. This is particularly true for Congressionally-appropriated funds, whether they are hundreds of billions of dollars in support of warfighting, equipment, and reconstruction in Iraq, or a few million dollars to support anti-terrorism financing operations, or humanitarian assistance efforts.

As such, we continue to feel that special considerations be factored in to travel arrangements of all Congressional members, particularly those serving on this Committee, which include access to all reconstruction projects and U.S.-military controlled areas. In order to maximize the productivity of future delegations to the region, and ensure Congress has the most up-to-date information available to it in reviewing U.S. foreign policy, there is simply no substitute for firsthand observations and communications.

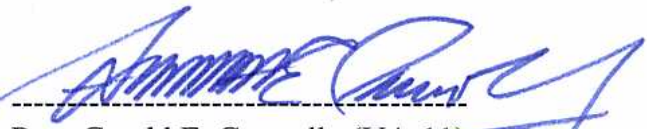

Rep. Stephen F. Lynch (MA-09)


Rep. Todd Russell Platts (PA-19)


Rep. Jim McDermott (WA-07)


Rep. Steve Driehaus (OH-01)


Rep. Glenn Thompson (PA-05)


Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)

Official Meetings

Iraq – February 27-28, 2009

- Briefing with Patricia Butenis, Chargé D’Affaires and GEN Raymond Odierno, Commander, Multi-National Forces - Iraq
- Briefing with LTG Lloyd Austin, Commander, Multi-National Corps – Iraq
- Briefing with MG Timothy McHale, Director, Status of Forces Agreement, Multi-National Corps - Iraq
- Visit and Tour of Ameriya Women and Children Clinic, Baghdad
- Briefing with LTG Frank Helmick, Commander, Multi-National Security Transition Command – Iraq and NATO Training Mission - Iraq

Afghanistan – March 1-2, 2009

- Briefing with Kirk Meyer, Director JIASSE/DEA
- Briefing with GEN David McKiernan, Commander, International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) - Afghanistan
- Briefing with BG Ed Reeder, Commander – Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan
- Briefing with BG John W. Nicholson, Jr. – ISAF RC-South
- Question and Answer with RC-South Coalition Leaders
- Briefing with COL Duffy White , Commander, Marine Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force- Afghanistan
- Meeting with Dr. Charles Johnson, Principal Deputy, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
- Meeting with Ambassador Christopher Dell, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy

Hungary- March 2, 2009

- Meeting with Mr. Gábor Szentiványi, State Secretary, Political Director on terrorist financing
- Reception hosted by Hon. April H. Foley, U.S. Ambassador to Hungary